

Gordon

Pls. return Bill

Harry Barber ms

To Cora

from

Harry July 2nd 1900

To say that History is a record of the past, is at least concise, but does not portray all that it implies. History is a record of events, political, economic, religious, national, racial, military and civil. It is the story of the development in Art, Science and Literature. There is, however, one phase of History which transcends all others in interest, one that adds color and romance to what otherwise would be dull reading. It is the personal equation; the story of human endeavor and achievement in the countless different fields.

JUST ROAMING THROUGH THE PAST - -----.

The story that I am about to record may not be filled with color and romance but if the reader gets as much kick out of it as I do in recording it, I will be satisfied. I am sure some will agree, as one advances in years, many cherished recollections of the past keep crowding through the creaking doors of memory, bringing much joy and happiness. My story is based on these recollections.

*James*  
I have my father's word for it, that I arrived on a cold morning in the month of March, in a picturesque Ontario village. The eastern winter had piled drifts so high that poor dad had to tunnel his way to the street to bring the family doctor.

I must tell you something about this little settlement where I first saw the light of day and where I spent my boyhood days.

It was the once thriving village of Alton, on the banks of the Credit River. In those early days it was the case of Industry going to Power, rather, than as it is today, carrying Power to Industry. Power came directly from the river, several large dams fed the water through flumes directly to the water-wheels which turned the machinery. These industries included woolen mills, flour mills, foundry and carriage works and all combined to provide a nice pay-roll at the end of the month. The Village was well provided with places of business including general stores, harness shop, hardware, drug store and bakery, along with two hotels. Professional services were limited to that of a medical doctor, and if the services of a lawyer was required it was necessary to visit one of the larger centers. Three churches looked after spiritual welfare of the community. The dear old Magistrate dispensed justice and the village constable had the responsibility of preserving order. There was a Mechanic's Institute which provided





Some youngster you will  
agree. Dressed in his  
velvet gown.

On the right sister Cora  
brother Everton on the chair  
and "yours truly" with the  
ten cent watch. Cora wanted  
to know, "what time is it by  
your gold watch and chain.?.





a good library as well as reading room. This is a fair picture of the villiage, as I recollect it.

Now a word about my father. He was the "villiage blacksmith" with the exception of the "spreading chestnut tree" everything else was there.

As a little chap, I spent many an hour watching the sparks fly from the anvil and at a safe distance viewed the operation of shoeing the old gray mare. One day dad gave me a small hammer and I was soon busy driving old horseshoe nails into the doorstep of the shop. I became quite

interested in this job and over a period of time I made a fair job of iron-plating that old step. Father was the son of an Irish immigrant who came to Canada to better his lot, settling on a farm about two miles west of Alton. Dad was born on that farm on December, 29th, 1864, the second son in family of seven. When he was nine years old his father

died leaving his mother with six sons and one daughter. On that 160 acres, grandmother not only managed to feed and clothe her family of seven

but married again and raised a second family of four boys and one girl.

Naturally, the boys had to leave home at an early age to seek their own livelihood. Father came to Alton at the age of fourteen and served three

years learning the blacksmithing trade. After completing his apprenticeship

a search for work was started which took him well over Ontario. This

is how father described conditions, "they talk of depression, why in

1865, you could get no work, I came back to Alton and worked on farm

for seven and a half months at ten dollars a month. When I got my money

I went to the United States and in 24 hours had a job at \$2.00 a day

in Lexington, Mich, later moving to Jackson, Mich, where I obtained a job

in a carriage shop and sent for my brother Sam". The two brothers

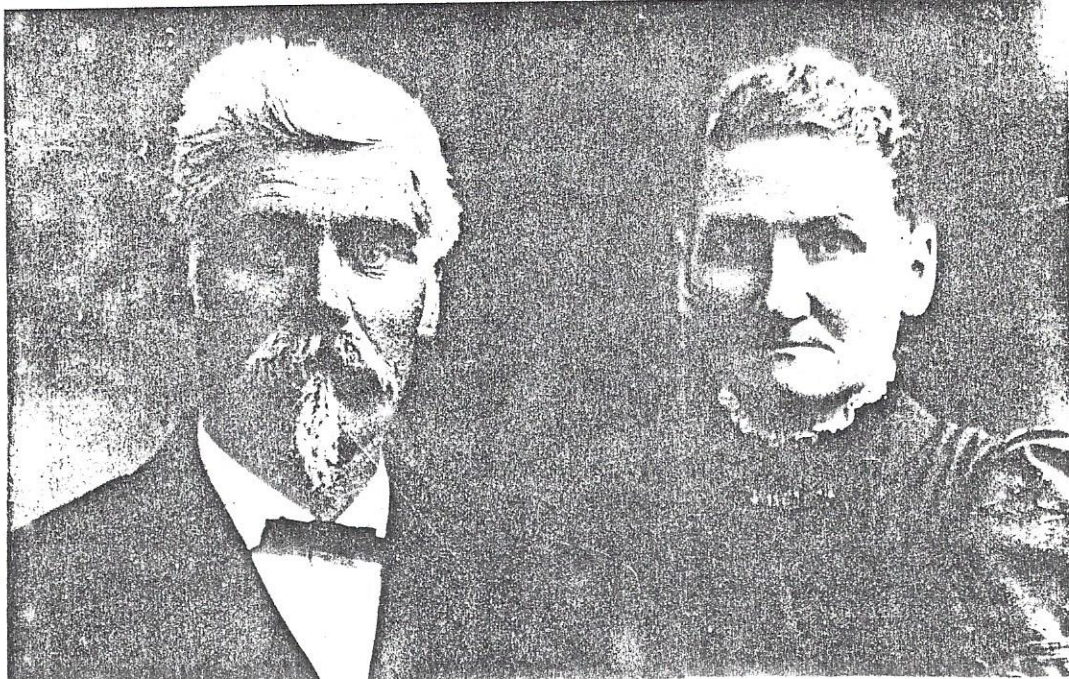
returned to Alton in 1870 and entered into a general blacksmith business

with a few carriages and waggons on the side. "Alton was a busy place

in those days", said father, "four hotels, a chair factory, an axe factory,

one wagon shop, a general store and two blacksmith shops made up the





Father and step-mother.

photo -  
(Barber Bros. Blacksmith Shop -  
see album - # 2, 8)



business life of the villiage."

In 1892, fire destroyed their shop and equiptment, in spite of their heavy loss, they immediately began construction of a more modern fire-proof building, when completed covered half an acrea of land. In the new, two story factory they were able to increase the output of carriages to 500 a year.. The Barber Carriage was well known throughout Western Ontario. Samuel Barber died in 1910, which broke the long partnership and father retired from business. The business was continued by my brother Everton untill the first great war broke when it was converted into a munitions plant. Father passed away in his 89th year at the home of my sister.

Now getting back to our home. By the time mother had started me off to school, a sister and baby brother had arrived in our family. I have since realized that mother had her hands full with her household duties and caring for three lively youngsters. We were a happy little family. Then that fatal day came in June, 1882, when I was seven years of age, our dear mother was taken from us. It was at child-birth when my younger brother was born. The Doctor pronounced it blood poisoning. Although young as I was, that scene in the death chamber was indelibly impressed on my mind. Mother was conscious for some hours and as we three youngsters gathered around her bed, she presented each with a new testament and joined in singing along, with her two sisters, a well known hymn. If the new drugs and modern technique of present day physicans had been available, many a mother of those days would have been spared. It was a hard blow to father, left with four young children but we were most fortunate in having a fine womwn step in as housekeeper and whom a few years later became our stepmother. No woman could have filled that gap better; she was a real mother to us and we all loved her. Her kindness has not been forgotten. In later years when she developed



poor health my sister stepped in and assumed a great deal of the work and responsibility of the household. We had no modern conveniences, as we now understand them. We retired to the kitchen for our Saturday night baths, utilizing the family washtub with kettles of hot water from the stove. It was also a custom to have all boots blackened on Saturday night so as to be ready for Sunday School next morning. We were blessed with a coal heater and the floors made comfortable with the old type rag carpets woven by the local weaver. On the walls, I recall the shallow framed boxes displaying hair-wreaths and mottos worked in burlen wool. In the evenings father would get down on the carpet and help us with our school work and in later years entertain us by reading from one of the popular books of the day, "With Stanley in Africa". There were no picture shows, radio was not heard of and the gramophone had not been invented. A special treat was the occasional visit of the Jubilee Singers or a Sunday School concert with local talent. Amateur plays were occasionally put on in what was known as Science Hall. Occasionally we would visit our dear old grandmother on the fifth line, who would gather us around her and tell us the story of her early days in Northern Ireland.

Now a word about the people of this part of Ontario. The great majority of the early pioneers were Irish protestants and good Orangemen. It might be truthfully said that this particular section was "cradled in Orangeism". The Orange Lodges were the first organized fraternities; Through these the pioneers gave expression to their loyalty at a time when the destiny of Canada was far from being assured. Orange halls were provided for public meetings and for entertainment of all kinds. In this way, leading members of the Order created public sentiment and largely directed the social



life of the people. Our days of celebration were the 24th of May in honor of our Gracious Queen, Dominion Day, and the glorious 12th of July. The 5th of November was celebrated by a torch-light parade and the burning in effigy of Guy Fawkes. Loyalty to the Crown was the basis upon which this particular section of the country was founded.

Those were the days of home manufacture. I recall that we made our own soap. Barrels were filled with the hardwood ashes, water was poured on, and through a small hole in the bottom of the barrel the liquid dripped. This process was termed "leaching". The liquid, which was lye, was then boiled with fats in large iron pots. The result was soap which was cut into bricks, dried and used for laundry work. Candles were made from tallow, melted and poured into molds containing the wick. When the time arrived when I must have a new straw hat, I didn't go to a store but walked a couple of miles and left my measurements with my grandmother. Out of clean, bright oat straw she would plait long ribbons, which she would stitch together to form the crown and a wide rim. Home-made carpets were the order of the day. Rags of different colors were torn into narrow strips, sewn together and rolled into balls. These balls were placed into sacks and taken down to the local weaver who turned out a carpet of many colors.

Many of the customs of the earlier pioneers still prevailed. Much of the clothing for men and boys were made from the backs of sheep. This home industry commenced with the washing of the sheep. The sheep were placed in an enclosure near the waterfall or flume from one of the mill dams. Each sheep was caught and passed on to two stout men, who waist deep in water held them under the fast flowing stream until they were thoroughly washed, then they were turned loose on the green sward on the opposite bank. In the course



of a few days when the wool had dried, the fleeces were removed by hand shears. When the operation was completed the great pile of wool was removed to a suitable building. Some weeks later followed the picking and carding process, which generally took the form of a bee, when mothers and grandmothers of the neighborhood gathered in the farm kitchen. The wool was brought in and as it passed through their patient fingers, all pieces of sticks, burrs, etc. were removed. The result was a huge pile resembling a bunch of seafoam. Through the long winter evenings the wool was carded by rolling into rolls about three feet long and about as thick as one's small finger. This operation took a great deal of time and required considerable skill, after which followed the process of spinning. The old spinning wheel was brought down from the garret and the rolls were fed to the spindle, one by one, resulting in beautiful yarn, pure and strong. When the process was completed and the yarn divided into skeins, it was washed carefully and dyed. The dye was usually made from butternuts gathered in the Fall and boiled in a large kettle until the water took on a dark brown color. Into this the yarn was dipped, then dried and again washed and dried. It was then taken to a local weaver who converted it into cloth. Toward Spring the local seamstress was called in to help make suits for the boys. As to styles it is safe to say that in some cases the coats resembled salt bags with two arms. In their new spring attire the boys marched off to church on Sunday, with some joker remarking "there goes the butternut brigade on their way to worship".

In the construction of homes and barns there was full co-operation among the settlers. Barn raisings were looked forward to as a sort of social event generally ending with the old-time dance. Fences were built from rails split from cedar logs. The maple bush supplied the home requirements for sugar and syrup. Trees were tapped and

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the sap caught by a container placed close to the tree and collected once or twice a day. Then the sugaring-off took place; Large iron kettles were used to boil down the sap. It was a time when the junior members of the district took a hand in the "boiling down" process. Toffy was popular and the test applied was by pouring it on the snow. One piece of furniture I admired very much in my grandmother's home, was a glass enclosed cupboard filled with cakes of maple sugar. Then there was the jam on the shelves sweetened with the same product. Needless to say we enjoyed a visit to grandmother.

Those were the days of the straw ticks. The modern mattress was unknown although a few homes enjoyed the luxury of sleeping on feather beds. The straw tick was a huge cotton bag, about six by three feet, filled in the Fall with clean oat straw. The freshly filled bags made the bed so high that a young ladder would almost be required for the sleepy youngster to reach the top.

Recreation was not overlooked. During the Winter months skating and sleigh riding was enjoyed by young and old. A small mountain which we termed a pinnacle provided an ideal place for a sled and toboggan slide requiring considerable skill to navigate the openings in the rail fences. Skating on the mill ponds was popular. In the evenings large bonfires burned in the center of these rinks around which the happy throng whirled. Hockey was not the term applied to a similar game in thosedays. Sticks used were similar to the old walking sticks and cut from the neighboring bush. Sides were chosen and the game of shinny was on. The familiar expression of "shinny on your own side" was framed.

During the summer months baseball was popular. Youngsters as well as oldsters joined in the sport. The history of the game dated back to 1875 when the first team was organized by an uncle



of mine and the local druggist. It required some nerve to enter the game in those days. The ball was made of hard rubber and instead of being thrown to a base-man, was hurled directly at the runner, and if the throw was accurate the runner knew he was out, and often remained "out" for some time. Gloves, masks and other modern paraphernalia were unknown. Players simply dusted resin on their hands to protect them from fast balls. For many years the Alton "Aetna's" was the outstanding nine in the district. Exhibition games were played with teams from neighboring towns on Saturday afternoons and holidays. These were great days in the life of the villagers who backed their team to the limit. Wherever the team travelled there went its supporters, farmers forsook their plows, mechanics laid down their tools and merchants closed their stores. Men and women alike donned their sunday best and went out to cheer for their boys. It was quite common for feelings to run high, fistic encounters not only among the players, but often among the supporters, you might find the main actors. One of the outstanding instances connected with the game that comes to my mind was Sam Boggs' excursion to a game in the neighboring village of Erin. Boggs procured a steam traction engine to which he hitched three farm waggons gaily decorated and plastered with humorous signs. In the first conveyance was the village band, while in the other two the team and its supporters. Leaving early in the morning, the entourage attained the breakneck speed of three miles an hour. Fuel to feed the monster came from fence rails along the route. The quaint procession arrived in the environs of Erin about ten o'clock and as it was about to enter the village, a train was approaching the railway crossing. Boggs, as a joke tooted the whistle of the threshing engine and the engineer of the train, whether he thought another train was approaching, or merely to join in the fun,

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stopped his train for about fifteen minutes while the puffing thresher and its farm waggons rattled over the track.

Succeeding generations continued to play the game but the coming of the war and its aftermath disbanded the game as it also changed the whole picture of the village. Industries were being more and more centralized in larger towns with power being supplied by hydro.

Transportation was limited mainly to the horse. Livery stables supplied buggies and horses at a very low price. Trains puffed through the district conveying passengers from station to station. The form of the bicycle at that time was quite different from the present day models. Today children seem to be born with a certain instinct that allows them to mount a bicycle and ride away without any great effort. In those days the models had a front wheel up to 60 inches in diameter while the back wheel sunk to a diameter of 16 inches. It took a lot of time and many falls to learn to ride this contraption. The rider, in order to mount into the saddle, had to hop along on one foot with the other placed on a little step fastened to the long backbone of the machine which connected the two wheels, then make a flying leap into the saddle. Riding a bucking bronco or walking a tight wire was a simple feat compared with this one. In the early nineties the low bicycle came into being known as the "safety".



Quite often the question is asked; "Why did you choose Pharmacy as your profession?" The answer is, that I did not make the choice. The economic conditions existing at the time were no doubt responsible for me entering the profession. I had gone as far as my father felt he could afford in my high school education. I had completed what was then junior matriculation which qualified for entry into pharmacy. Father was anxious that I should enter some calling that would be lighter than that of a blacksmith. That physically I was not fitted for the heavy work required of one entering the shop, so it was my dad that arranged with the local druggist for me to enter as an apprentice. The apprenticeship called for four years service with remuneration of ninety dollars the first year, gradually increased each year with \$180.00 the fourth year. I entered the drug store in July, 1891 at the age of 16 years and graduated from the Ontario College of Pharmacy in the Spring of 1896. During the four years I received my board at home with the understanding that I was to save what I earned during my apprenticeship to put me through the year at college. I supplemented this by returns from a small flock of sheep. When I was quite a young chap an uncle gave me a lamb which I put out on shares to a farmer, my share in the flock to be doubled every three years. By the time I reached 16 I was the owner of 16 sheep. These I sold and with the money bought a few purebreds which produced better breeding stock and a better price for lambs in the Fall. I had the use of a stable on our place and in Summer free pasture on a commons to the rear. With returns for the wool I purchased winter feed. The revenue from the sale of lambs was net to me and enabled me to purchase clothing and have a little spending money on the side. I enjoyed looking after these animals, particularly during lambing time. I recall one instance which pretty nigh wrecked



my venture. Heading the flock was a gentleman sheep that did not take kindly to everyone. One day my dad was shovelling snow to make a runway for the small flock. This leader of the flock on this occasion proved to be no gentleman for when father stooped over he suddenly charged him in the rear. The soft snow prevented physical injury but his dignity was so badly hurt that I thought it wise for me to make myself scarce. Everything returned to normal in a short time and we had many a laugh over it.

I was quite proud of myself that first day behind the counter. I was just a kid in short pants but I recall to this day my first sale, a bottle of Castoria. The customer was a neighbor and a good friend of our family. I quoted a price of 25¢ and the lady came back at me, "Harry my boy, if you continue this, your boss will be broke". She advised me the price was 35¢, not 25¢ - this perhaps impressed it on my mind. My first job was washing bottles, rubbing up some stock ointments and a lesson on rolling pills. We made our own tinctures and pills. Quinine was a drug that was quite generally used and I recall when gelatin capsules came in. To mask the bitter taste we filled the capsules with the quinine. I got quite a surprise one day when a good lady brought the empty capsules back to be refilled with the suggestion that "I refill the little glass bottles".

During the fourth year of my apprenticeship, owing to illness of the boss, I done practically all the prescription work. We had one medical man and his office was at the rear of the drug store. He was quite a professional as far as dress was concerned, when making his rounds he wore a silk hat and Prince Albert. He was inclined to be careless with instruments in his office and many a time I cleaned them for him. In addition to his practice he had the commercial telegraph office. This afforded me an opportunity

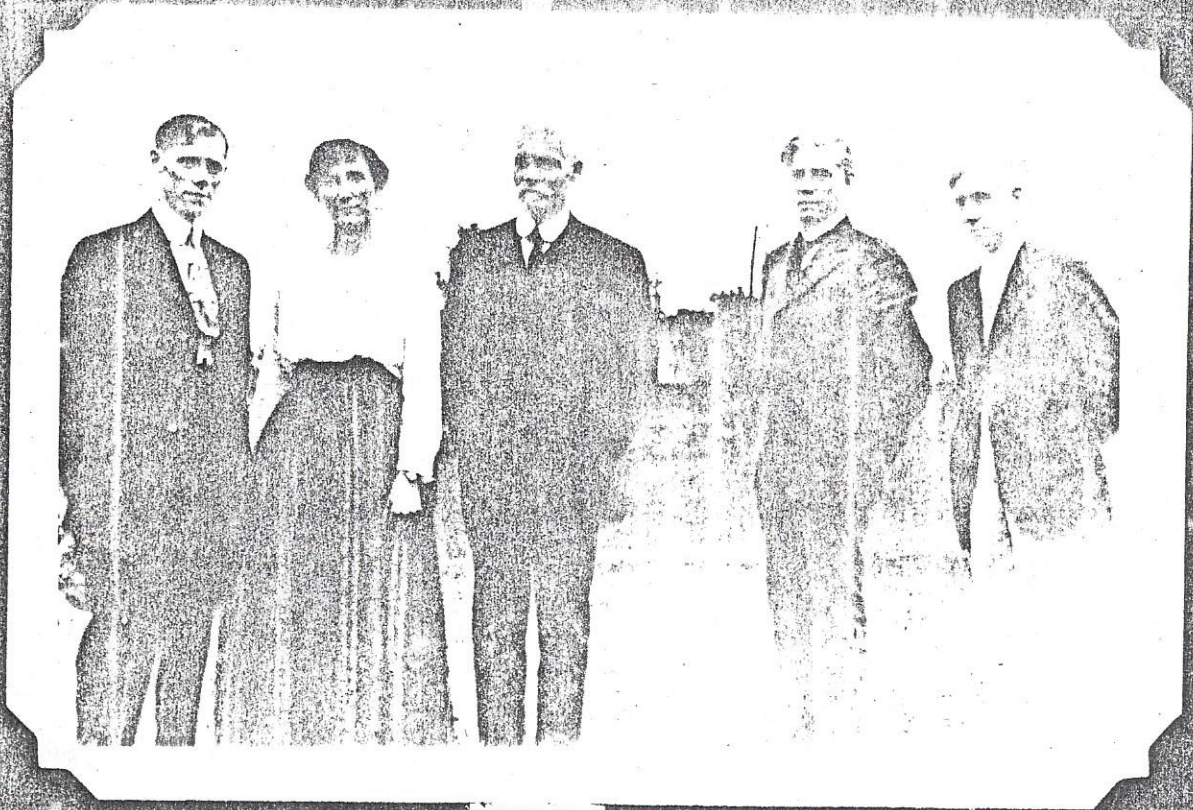


to learn the morse code and take messages during the absence of the Doctor. This came in very handy in the years to come. I also assisted him in minor operations.

The four years apprenticeship soon passed and in the fall of 1895 I entered the Ontario College of Pharmacy, graduating the following Spring. I thought now, armed with a parchment certifying that I was a fully qualified Pharmaceutical Chemist, that my troubles were over but I soon found out different. The only employment I could find was in the form of relief work at \$30.00 a month and by the time I paid board and transportation I had very little left. Rather than be idle I went into my father's carriage works and was assigned the job of drilling steel tires for bolting clips to the wheels.

This was about the time some one was credited with saying, "Go West, young man". "The call of the West" was on and I directed my thoughts in that direction.

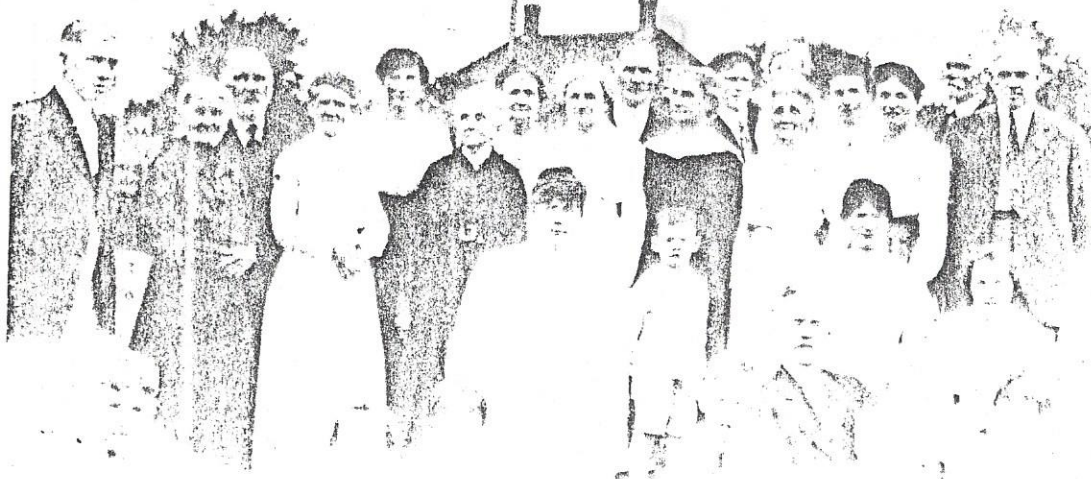




PHOTOGRAPHS

A good catch speckled trout. Father and Cora.





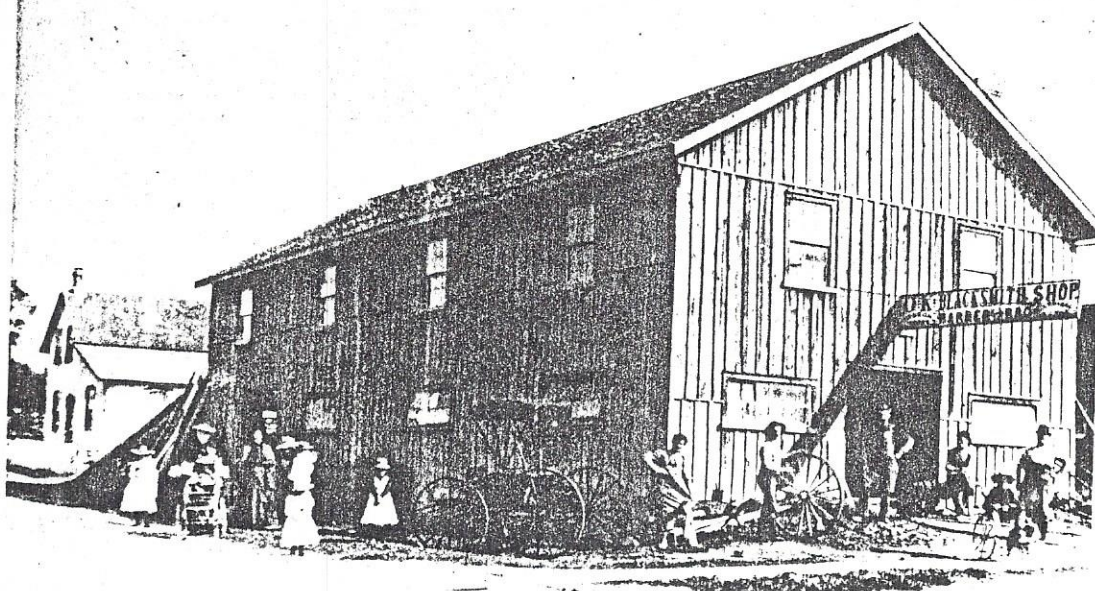
A most interesting family group. Everton on the left and Jack Dods on the right. Aunts and Uncles, Cousins, nephews nieces making up the body of the group.



The three generations,  
James, Jack & Harry.

PHOTOGRAPHS





PHOTOCRAFTS

The old blacksmith-shop. Uncle Sam on right, father seated on bench. Geo Ziegler with wheel, Uncle Tom with apron. On left Cora, the stout lady Grandmother Henderson, youngsters I don't know. One of the Barber buggies.

*(Harry Barber ms.)*

#### Alton Brothers Shop

The old Barber Brothers Blacksmith Shop before it was burned down in 1892. The subsequent one, opened in 1894, can be seen today in the village. The three Barber brothers are on the extreme right; George Zeigler is holding the wheels; on the extreme left is Cora Barber; the lady in black is grandmother Henderson. The buggy was made by Barber Brothers. The story of Alton Village begins on page 9 of this issue.

*(Tweedsmuir Papers)*